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United States Department of Agriculture

PRODUCTION AND MARKETING ADMINISTRATION

SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS NO. 123¹

OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF LAMB, YEARLING MUTTON, AND MUTTON CARCASSES

(Title 7, Ch. I, Pt. 53, Sections 53.114–53.118 of the Code of Federal Regulations)

The following is a reprint of the official United States standards for the grades of lamb and mutton carcasses heretofore promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (60 Stat. 1087; 7 U. S. C. 1621 et seq.) and the items for Market Inspection of Farm Products and Marketing Farm Products recurring in the annual appropriation acts for the Department of Agriculture. The standards are reprinted as amended.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARDS

The official standards for grades of lamb and mutton carcasses were initially promulgated and made effective on February 16, 1931. The standards were amended in October 1940 (Amendment No. 1 to S. R. A. 123) so as to change the grade designations Medium and Common to Commercial and Utility, respectively. In April 1951, the official standards were again amended (Amendment No. 2 to S. R. A. 123). By this amendment, Prime and Choice grades were combined and designated as Prime. The Good grade was renamed Choice, which also became the highest grade for carcasses of mutton older than yearlings. The top two-thirds of the Commercial grade was designated as Good. The lower one-third of the Commercial grade was combined with the top two-thirds of the Utility grade and designated as Utility, thereby eliminating the Commercial grade name. The lower one-third of the Utility grade was combined with the Cull grade and designated as Cull. This amendment also provided for reflecting the minimum requirements for each grade, specified the grade requirements for varying degrees of maturity, and clarified the method for differentiating between lamb, yearling mutton, and mutton carcasses.

DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN LAMB, YEARLING MUTTON, AND MUTTON CARCASSES

Ovine carcasses are classified as lamb, yearling mutton, or mutton on the basis of characteristics of the bones, general conformation, and characteristics of the flesh.

Lamb carcasses always have break joints on their front shanks and generally have narrow rib bones, a rather regular contour, and a light red color and fine texture of lean. They also have a considerable amount of red in the ribs and a somewhat smaller amount in the shanks.

Yearling mutton carcasses may have either break joints or "spool" joints on their front shanks and generally have moderately wide rib bones, a slightly irregular contour, and a slightly dark red color and slightly coarse texture of lean. They have only traces of red in the ribs and shanks.

Mutton carcasses always have "spool" joints on their front shanks and generally have wide rib bones, a rather irregular contour, and a dark red color and coarse texture of lean. Ribs and shanks are devoid of red color.

¹This publication was last issued as Service and Regulatory Announcements No. 123 of the former Agricultural Marketing Service. The work on which it is based is now a part of the Production and Marketing Administration.

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

Lamb, yearling mutton, and mutton carcasses are graded on a composite evaluation of three general grade factors—conformation, finish, and quality. These factors are concerned with the proportions of the various wholesale cuts in the carcass, the proportions of fat, lean, and bone, and the quality of the flesh. Carcasses qualifying for any particular grade may vary with respect to their relative development of the three grade factors, and there will be carcasses which qualify for a particular grade, some of whose characteristics may be more nearly typical of another grade. Because it is impracticable to describe the nearly limitless numbers of such recognizable combinations of characteristics, the standards for each grade describe only carcasses that have a relatively similar development of conformation, finish, and quality and that are generally also representative of the lower limits of each grade. Examples of the extent to which superiority in quality and finish may compensate for deficiencies in conformation, and vice versa, are indicated for each grade.

The standards are intended to apply to all ovine carcasses without regard to the apparent sex condition of the animal at time of slaughter. However, carcasses which have thick, heavy necks and shoulders typical of uncastrated males are discounted in grade in accord with the extent to which these characteristics are developed. Such discounts may vary from less than half a grade in carcasses from young lambs in which such characteristics are barely noticeable to as much as two full grades in carcasses from mature rams in which such characteristics are very pronounced.

The standards provide for the grading of lamb, yearling mutton, and mutton carcasses on separate standards. Although the age groups of the animals appear to be rather narrow, each group actually represents a rather wide range in degree of maturity because of the rapidity with which ovines mature. Recognition of group variation is made in the standards for grades of lamb carcasses by specifying two different requirements for quality and finish, depending on the degree of maturity. Although only one requirement for quality and finish is specified in the standards for yearling mutton and for mutton carcasses, it should be understood that in these groups, as well as in the lamb groups, carcasses which have indications of approaching the minimum or maximum maturity limits for their group will have somewhat less or greater evidences of quality and finish, respectively, than those specified in the standards.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF LAMB CARCASSES

PRIME

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Prime grade tend to be compact and blocky, and tend to have plump, full legs; wide, thick backs; thick, full, smooth shoulders; and short, thick necks.

Evidences of quality and finish vary markedly with changes in maturity. Carcasses from young lambs that have red, narrow rib bones and red, moist, porous break joints have only moderately abundant kidney and crotch fat but kidneys are completely covered. They have a moderate amount of feathering between the ribs, a small amount of overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, a few fat streakings in the inside flank muscles and a light pink color of lean. The exterior finish is firm and completely obscures the muscles of the back; however, muscles over the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs may be visible through a thin covering of fat. Flanks are full and firm.

Carcasses from more mature lambs that have slightly wide, moderately red rib bones, and moderately red, rather dry and hard break joints, have abundant kidney and crotch fat, extensive and abundant feathering, moderately abundant overflow fat over inside of ribs adjacent to the backbone, numerous streakings of fat in the inside flank muscles, and a dark pink color of lean. The exterior finish is very firm, and extends over the entire exterior surface, except the lower parts of the legs, obscuring the muscles of the back, tops of the shoulders, and outside of legs. The flanks are very full and firm.

To qualify for the Prime grade a carcass must possess the minimum requirements for quality and finish regardless of the extent that its conformation may

exceed the minimum requirements for Prime. However, if a carcass has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Prime grade, its conformation may be equivalent to average Choice and remain eligible for Prime.

CHOICE

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Choice grade are slightly compact with slightly plump, full legs; slightly wide, thick backs; slightly wide, full shoulders; and slightly short, thick necks.

Evidences of quality and finish vary considerably with changes in maturity. Carcasses from young lambs that have red, narrow rib bones and red, moist, porous break joints have slightly abundant kidney and crotch fat but kidneys are slightly exposed, there is a small amount of feathering between the ribs, a few streakings of fat in the inside flank muscles, and only very small quantities of overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone. The color of lean is slightly dark pink. The exterior finish is moderately firm. However, the muscles of the back are very slightly visible through a slightly thin fat covering and those over the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs have only a very thin covering of fat. Flanks are slightly full and firm.

Carcasses from more mature lambs that have slightly wide, moderately red rib bones with moderately red, rather dry and hard break joints, have moderately abundant kidney and crotch fat, slightly abundant feathering, a small amount of overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, a small quantity of fat streakings in the inside flank muscles, and light red color of lean. The external finish is firm and completely obscures the muscles of the back. However, muscles over the top of the shoulders and the outside of the legs are visible through the fat. The flanks are moderately full and firm.

To qualify for the Choice grade a carcass must have the minimum requirements for quality and finish regardless of the extent that conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Choice. However, if a carcass has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Choice grade, its conformation may be equivalent to average Good and remain eligible for Choice.

GOOD

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Good grade are moderately rangy and slightly angular with slightly thin, tapering legs; slightly narrow; thin backs and shoulders; and moderately long, thin necks.

Evidences of quality and finish vary moderately with changes in maturity. Carcasses from young lambs that have red, narrow rib bones and red, porous break joints have a small amount of kidney and crotch fat and kidneys are only partially covered. There is no feathering between the ribs, no overflow fat over the inside of the ribs and no fat streakings in the inside flank muscles; however, the lean is dark pink in color. The exterior finish is slightly soft; the muscles of the back are plainly visible through a very thin fat covering and those over the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs are practically devoid of fat. Flanks are moderately thin and soft.

Carcasses from more mature lambs that have slightly wide, moderately red rib bones and moderately red, rather dry and hard break joints have slightly abundant kidney and crotch fat with kidneys slightly exposed. There is a slight amount of feathering between the ribs but no overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, practically no streakings of fat in the inside flank muscles, and a slightly dark red color of lean. The exterior finish is moderately firm. However, the muscles of the back are visible through a thin fat covering and those over the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs have only a very thin fat covering. Flanks are slightly thin and soft.

A carcass that has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade. Also, a carcass that has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade.

UTILITY

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Utility grade are very rangy and angular with thin, slightly concave legs; very narrow, sunken

backs; narrow, sharp shoulders; and long, thin necks. Hips and shoulder joints are plainly visible.

Although evidences of quality and finish vary slightly with changes in maturity, the differences are so small as to make their separate descriptions impractical. Carcasses have only a small amount of kidney and crotch fat, and the kidneys are nearly entirely exposed. There is practically no other interior fat, and the lean in the inside flank muscles and between the ribs is dark red in color. External finish is soft and is limited to small deposits over the rump and outside of the shoulders and to thin patches over the back. Flanks are soft and slightly watery.

A carcass that has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Utility grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade. Also, a carcass that has quality and finish equivalent to the average of the Utility grade may have conformation equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade.

CULL

Typical Cull grade carcasses are extremely rangy and angular and extremely thin-fleshed throughout. Legs are extremely thin and concave, backs are extremely sunken and thin, shoulders are very thin and sharp, and necks are extremely thin. Hip and shoulder joints, as well as ribs and bones of the spinal column, are clearly outlined. There are practically no interior or exterior fats, and the flesh is soft and watery and very dark red in color.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF YEARLING MUTTON CARCASSES

PRIME

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Prime grade are compact and blocky, and have plump, full legs; wide, thick backs; wide, full, smooth shoulders; and short, thick necks. They have abundant but not excessive kidney and crotch fat; extensive and abundant feathering; and moderately abundant overflow fat over inside of ribs adjacent to the backbone, numerous streakings of fat in the inside flank muscles, and a light red color of lean. The exterior finish is very firm and uniform and extends over the entire exterior surface, except the lower parts of the legs, obscuring the muscles of the back, tops of the shoulders, and outside of the legs. The flanks are very full and firm.

To qualify for the Prime grade a carcass must possess the minimum qualifications for quality and finish regardless of the extent that conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Prime. However, if a carcass has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Prime grade, its conformation may be equivalent to average Choice and remain eligible for the Prime grade.

CHOICE

Carcasses possessing the minimum requirements for the Choice grade are moderately compact with rather short, plump, full legs; moderately wide, thick backs; moderately wide, full shoulders; and rather short, thick necks. They have moderately abundant kidney and crotch fat, slightly abundant feathering, slightly abundant overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, a small quantity of fat streakings in the inside flank muscles, and a slightly dark red color of lean. The exterior finish is firm and completely obscures the muscles of the back; however, muscles on the top of the shoulders and the outside of the legs are visible through the fat. The flanks are moderately full and firm.

Carcasses which are not eligible for the Prime grade because they have buncy or irregular distribution of exterior finish or excessive quantities of interior fat are also included in the Choice grade.

To qualify for the Choice grade a carcass must have the minimum requirements for quality and finish regardless of the extent that conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Choice. However, if a carcass has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Choice grade, its conformation may be equivalent to average Good and remain eligible for Choice.

GOOD

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Good grade are slightly rangy and angular, with slightly thin, tapering legs; slightly narrow, thin backs and shoulders; and slightly long, thin necks. They have slightly abundant kidney and crotch fat, with kidneys slightly exposed. There is a slight amount of feathering between the ribs, only very small quantities of overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, a few streakings of fat in the inside muscles of the flank, and a rather dark red color of lean. The exterior finish is moderately firm; however, the muscles of the back are visible through a thin covering of fat and the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs have only a very thin fat covering. Flanks are slightly thin and soft.

A carcass which has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade. Also, a carcass which has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade.

UTILITY

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Utility grade are very rangy and angular with thin, slightly concave legs; very narrow, sunken backs; narrow, sharp shoulders; and long, thin necks. Hips and shoulder joints are plainly visible. They have only a small amount of kidney and crotch fat, and the kidneys are nearly entirely exposed. There is practically no other interior fat and the lean in the flanks and between the ribs is dark red in color. External finish is soft, and is limited to small deposits over the rump and outside of the shoulders and to thin patches over the back. Flanks are soft and slightly watery.

A carcass which has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Utility grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade. Also, a carcass which has quality and finish equivalent to the average of the Utility grade may have conformation equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade.

CULL

Typical Cull grade carcasses are extremely rangy and angular and extremely thin-fleshed throughout. Legs are extremely thin and concave, backs are extremely sunken and thin, shoulders are very thin and sharp, and necks are extremely thin. Hip and shoulder joints, as well as ribs and bones of the spinal column, are clearly outlined. There are practically no interior or exterior fats and the flesh is soft and watery and very dark red in color.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF MUTTON CARCASSES

CHOICE

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Choice grade are moderately compact, with slightly plump, full legs; wide, thick backs; wide, full shoulders; and slightly short, thick necks. They have abundant kidney and crotch fat, moderately abundant feathering between the ribs, moderately abundant overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, numerous fat streakings in the inside flank muscles, and a dark red color of lean. The external finish is firm and moderately uniform and completely obscures the muscles of back and tops of the shoulders; however, the outsides of the legs are visible through a thin covering of fat. Flanks are moderately full and firm.

To qualify for the Choice grade a carcass must have the minimum requirements for quality and finish regardless of the extent that conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Choice. However, if a carcass has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Choice grade, its confirmation may be equivalent to average Good and remain eligible for Choice.

GOOD

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Good grade are slightly rangy and angular, with slightly thin, tapering legs; have slightly wide but slightly thin-fleshed backs and shoulders; and slightly long, thin necks. Hip and shoulder joints are visible. They have a moderate amount of kidney and crotch fat but kidneys are completely covered. There is a small amount of feathering between the ribs and a slight amount of overflow fat over the inside of the ribs adjacent to the backbone, a few streakings of fat in the inside flank muscles, and a dark red color of lean. The external finish is moderately firm; however, the muscles of the back are slightly visible through a thin fat covering and the tops of the shoulders and outside of the legs have a very thin fat covering. Flanks are slightly thin and soft.

Carcasses which are not eligible for the Choice grade because they have bunched or irregular distribution of exterior fat or excessive quantities of interior fat are also included in the Good grade.

A carcass which has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade. Also, a carcass which has quality and finish equivalent to at least the average of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to high Utility and remain eligible for the Good grade.

UTILITY

Carcasses possessing the minimum qualifications for the Utility grade are very rangy and angular, with thin, slightly concave legs; very narrow, sunken backs; narrow, sharp shoulders; and very long, thin necks. Hips and shoulder joints are prominent. They have only a small amount of kidney and crotch fat and kidneys are nearly entirely exposed. There are practically no other interior fats, and the lean in the inside flank muscles and between the ribs is very dark red in color. External finish is soft and is limited to small deposits over the rump and outside of the shoulders and to thin patches over the back. Flanks are soft and slightly watery.

A carcass which has conformation equivalent to at least the average of the Utility grade may have quality and finish equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade. Also, a carcass which has quality and finish equivalent to the average of the Utility grade may have conformation equivalent to high Cull and remain eligible for the Utility grade.

CULL

Typical Cull grade carcasses are extremely rangy and angular and extremely thin-fleshed throughout. Legs are extremely thin and concave, backs are extremely sunken and thin, shoulders are very thin and sharp, and necks are extremely thin. Hip and shoulder joints, as well as ribs and bones of the spinal column, are clearly outlined. There are practically no interior or exterior fats, and the flesh is soft and watery and very dark red in color.



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